

Lethe

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Summary: The less-confusing sequel to dreamdeath. Better,
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Lethe

Prologue

"Rachel. Come on, Rachel, come here," Tobias begged. She was so close, so very close. Her misty, transparent body was beginning to seem more real, flickering reality in some places.

And then she was real. Rachel sat up, looking confused. "What?" she asked vaguely, looking around.

Relieved, Tobias helped her to her feet.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, as Rachel groaned suddenly and started rubbing her forehead.

"Did I get hit in the head? It hurts," she said.

The others all smiled. "It's Rachel, alright!" Jake said.

"What happened?" Rachel always wanted to be the first to know what was going on.

Cassie approached Rachel and touched her, to see if she was real. "It's a long story."

"Tell me," Rachel said, waiting expectantly for a whole story.

Glances were exchanged all around. No one wanted to actually say anything.

< I see that you humans are playing that game again,> Ax said finally. < That game where no one seems to want to tell the other

something.>

"Yep, we're playing that game again," Tobias agreed, running his hand through his hair and looking at Rachel.

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Chapter one

A boy sat up in a meadow. Nearby, a river was rushing by. To his right, a beautiful blond girl lay on the grass, looking like she had collapsed.

His case wasn't much different. His arms and legs and robe were all tangled up and when he ran his hand through his hair he knew it was a mess. He stood up.

He was wearing a white robe that fell to his feet. The hood was down, and his hair was long enough that it got in his eyes. It was dirty blond.

He was barefoot and before he had taken two steps his feet got tangled in the robe and he fell down, right into the girl.

The girl squeaked and jerked away from him, then sat up, awake. "Who are you?" she demanded.

The boy blinked. "I, uh, I.... Who are you?"

Slowly, her angry expression faded into puzzlement. "I.... don't... know."

She smoothed her own white robes unconsciously, and then glanced at them, then at him, then around. It was only then that the boy saw other people lying in the grass, a distance away from them.

He turned to the girl. "Do you remember them?"

The girl shook her head. "I don't remember anything."

The boy knelt next to a girl, the same age as himself and the other girl. She had dark skin, contrasting with her white robes. "Are you okay?" he asked.

The girl stirred, like someone deeply asleep, and opened her eyes. "What? I'm fine, fine," she said, looking around. "Where am I?"

The boy shook his head.

The blond girl was looking at the only one that did not look human. She nudged it gently with her bare feet, gracefully stepping over another boy.

< Who are you?>

The voice disturbed the boy in a way he couldn't describe. For some reason, he thought that it should sound fiercer; angrier, perhaps.

The being was on his feet-- hooves, the boy saw. He was wearing his

own version of long white robes, which continued from his human shoulders to the tip of his tail, falling to the ground. His hood was the only one totally on, and two eyes on stalks peered in every direction.

"We don't know," the blond girl admitted.

The boy that she had stepped over moved, seemingly in his sleep, but sat up, rubbing his eyes.

The dark-skinned girl was shaking a figure a few feet away from the others. It was another boy, and he sat up and yawned. "What's going on?" he asked, before yawning again.

Everyone looked around.

No one remembered how they had gotten there.

No one remembered their name.

No one remembered their hopes and dreams, faith, love, or loyalties.

No one remembered past anger, hate or fear.

Everyone looked around, and smiled...

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Chapter two

"Elimist?" Tobias asked fearfully.

"Or Crayak," Rachel added, a determined look coming over her face. Tobias knew that look. It was the look of someone ready to fight.

Marco broke the brief silence that had followed her remark before it got worse. "Does it have to be either?"

That cause complete silence. Everyone looked at each other.

DOES IT HAVE TO BE EITHER, MARCO? THAT IS AN INTERESTING QUESTION.

Marco closed his eyes. "I wish I hadn't said that."

I AM SHEISU.

An ordinary human boy about sixteen years old appeared in front of them. Ordinary in all respects other than floating three feet off the ground.

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Sheisu had been watching the Animorphs.

Sheisu wasn't able to reach them like Crayak and an Elimist had. Sheisu could not interfere with that level of existence.

It took death for Sheius to be able to control them.

In Rachel's case, she was existing in a place close enough to death-- in Crayak's grip-- for Sheisu to take her, even if it had been painful for her. She was lucky. The Crayak would have put her through far worse.

Sheius was on neither side. Once people were dead, there was no point to particularly like one over the other. But it was easy to admire the human children who had stopped the Yeerk invasion for years, even if they did lose in the end.

And that was why they were collected in this place.

Crayak couldn't reach them here. An Elimist couldn't reach them here. Only Sheisu could affect the Animorphs. And there was one thing to do to them... one last gift that they would receive from their "all-powerful beings."

But even more so than the others that the Animorphs had met, Sheisu liked to play games....

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"Sheisu? Oh. How nice. Are you trying to kill us or 'not interfere'?"

MARCO, EXACTLY HOW COULD I INTERFERE? YOU ARE ALREADY DEAD.... REMEMBER? Sheisu gave an ironic grin.

Marco grinned sheepishly. "Oh... yeah."

"Who... well, what are you here for?" Rachel asked, hands on her hips. She was getting thoroughly exasperated with the direction her life was very rapidly heading.

I JUST WANTED TO GIVE YOU A CHOICE.

"Foon, not spork," Marco said brightly. "Was that all?"

THAT WAS NOT THE QUESTION I WAS GOING TO ASK, Sheisu said tolerantly.

Marco opened his mouth, but Rachel elbowed him in the ribs. "Shut up Marco," she snapped.

Marco closed his mouth.

I WAS GOING TO ASK MARCO HOW HE COULD BE SO UNENDINGLY IRRITATING HIS WHOLE LIFE.

For once, Marco was speechless. "Hey... hey!"

Sheisu laughed. NO, THE QUESTION I WAS GOING TO ASK WAS DIFFERENT. I WANTED TO KNOW IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO... HANG BETWEEN THE WORLDS. WATCH, AND MAYBE AFFECT WHAT IS GOING ON, DOWN ON EARTH.

Jake nodded, considering. "Why?"

BECAUSE YOU SIX ARE THE ONES WHO DESERVE IT. YOU, JAKE... AND YOU,

CASSIE. RACHEL. TOBIAS. MARCO. AXIMILI. PEOPLE ARE STILL THERE FIGHTING _YOUR_ WAR AND YOU SHOULD SEE IT.

"Why would we _not_ want to do that?" Jake asked.

IT COULD BE DANGEROUS. CRAYAK STILL WANTS RACHEL AND JAKE. THE ELIMIST STILL WANTS TO USE YOU FOR HIS OWN MEANS. YOU COULD BE BROUGHT BACK.

"Brought back?" Cassie asked.

YES. IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING.

"How?"

IF YOU WANT TO, YOU WILL BE NOT QUITE ALIVE. NOT QUITE DEAD. YOU WILL LEARN THAT THESE THINGS ARE MEANINGLESS. BUT THIS RISK...

Unending darkness that stretched farther than any eye could see...

I CAN NOT FORCE YOU TO DO ANYTHING.

Silence that deafened more surely than sound...

YOU CAN GET WHAT YOU WANT.

Opening your mouth to scream but you can't even feel if your mouth opens...

I CAN NOT SENTENCE YOU TO WHAT MAY BE A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH.

Spiraling into the darkness. Alone.

Everything was very quiet for a long time.

"Give us a while to think about it," Cassie begged.

YES. CALL ME WHEN YOU ARE READY.

Sheisu disappeared. And, as crazy as it seemed, a phone materialized in the grass. Tobias nudged it with his foot. "Ooookay, now that's weird," he muttered.

Everyone nodded, except for Ax. < What is it?> he asked.

"It's a telephone, Ax," Marco said, rolling his eyes. "Tobias, dial up a pizza place. I'm starving."

"Chinese takeout," Tobias protested.

"Can you get McDonalds to show up at your door?" Jake asked. "I just want a cheeseburger. And fries. And coke."

Tobias picked up the receiver. "Let's see what Sheisu's telephone can get us. I think we're all starving. Which is odd, because I didn't think you can get hungry in heaven."

"Heaven?" Marco laughed hysterically while Tobias dialed Information

and somehow instantly got to some guy who would get them food.

"Heaven has room service?" Marco asked as Tobias took their orders.

"Yep," Tobias said simply, relaying everything back to the phone. Seconds after he said, "Okay, that's it," the food appeared in the grass in front of him.

He grinned. "Okay, we can think better on a full stomach."

"Let's eat!" Marco said, biting into a slice of pizza dripping with cheese.

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Chapter three

"So? What are we going to do?" Jake asked, finishing his first cheeseburger.

Cassie shrugged. "We need to decide one way or the other. Just like everything else. We all do it or no one does it."

"Let's do it!" Marco cheered, mid-way through his third slice of pizza.

"My line," Rachel said softly. She seemed deep in thought, having barely touched her food.

Cassie could tell that her opinion was probably well worth listening to. "What do you think, Rachel?"

"I think... that we shouldn't do it."

There was silence for less than five seconds. Then Marco, staring, demanded, "_What_?"

"I don't think we should do it."

"But you always think we should do it! It's not like Xena to not want to do some suicidal plan."

"Not this time, Marco."

"Why not?" Cassie asked Rachel.

Rachel stared out into the robin's egg blue sky. "Did you feel that darkness while Sheisu was talking?"

"Darkness?" Jake demanded.

"Yes. Blind and paralyzed and... and falling. You didn't feel it?"

Tobias put his arm around her. "I saw you looking like you were going to scream. But I didn't feel it."

Cassie shook her head. "I didn't either. Why you? Why wouldn't Sheisu

let all of us see it?"

Rachel shrugged Tobias's arm. "Nevermind. Maybe it wasn't real."

"Maybe not real, but Sheisu must have made you see it for a reason."

Rachel stared at the sky. "Not Sheisu... not Sheisu..."

Uncomfortably, Marco started talking. "Well, he said we would be able to affect stuff. Maybe help the war. We could end up winning the war for them... even from here."

Cassie turned to Marco, looking up from Rachel's vacant expression. "There's a line between life and death, Marco."

_Of course there is... and I know it best. Because I have to balance on it. Not leaning too far from one side or the other-- _

_ You are a fool, brother, and your babbling nonsense is useless. You are saying that you are worthless to both side unless we give you a shove..._

"We stand on the line if we agree," Rachel said slowly.

Everyone turned back to her.

"I'm seeing... I'm seeing Sheisu's memory. I think. I might just be going crazy, but..."

"That's what Sheisu might be doing! He can't be here to sway our opinions but he is giving us advice in his own way."

Jake looked at Cassie. "Are you sure?"

"Fairly sure. Rachel, what do you think?"

"Yeah... that could be it."

Marco muttered something under his breath between bites of pizza, but no one heard what he said.

Tobias nervously wound his fingers around his chopsticks. "So what do you think, Rachel? Still think we shouldn't do it?"

"I... don't know. And it's not my choice, it's everyone's."

Jake sighed. "Preliminary vote. Who says we should?"

Everyone glanced around, not sure what to vote for. Cassie finally raised her hand. No one else did.

"Okay, who says not?"

Rachel hesitantly raised her hand. Ax followed. Tobias and Marco looked undecided.

"Well, that accomplished a lot," Jake said. "Guys? Why didn't you

vote?"

"You didn't vote either, Jake," Marco said.

Jake couldn't think of anything to respond to that with.

"We can help and possibly get brought back to life-- and what's exactly the problem with that? or we can sit here and do god-knows-what. I'll vote for doing it." Marco stepped beside Cassie.

"I get a bad feeling about being brought back to life," Rachel said quietly. "I don't think it's a good thing. And Ax, why did you vote with me?"

< I do not trust him,> Ax said. < He seems to be too... human. No offence intended.>

"None taken," Marco said sarcastically.

< I simply mean that he does not act like he is to be taken seriously...> Ax trailed off when he saw the way Rachel was looking at him.

"Okay, ignoring that comparison to humans, who thinks that Sheisu shouldn't be taken seriously?"

Tobias started, "Well, he did bring us here, and who knows how hard that--"

"Exactly. Who knows how hard that could be? It may be simple. Or someone else might have done it."

Everyone looked around uncomfortably. "But Rachel, he was floating... that sort of is difficult to do."

< No it isn't,> Ax said. < Well... at least for Andalites. If you have a hashaya machine and-->

"Ooookay let's forget Andalite technology," Marco said. "Basically, it's a risk and we want to know if we'll take the risk. Is it worth it, is it too risky?"

"I think it would be worth it," Cassie said.

"Too risky," Rachel said.

Marco sighed. "Jake, I don't know what's going on, but when Rachel doesn't want to do something..."

"I side with Cassie," Jake said abruptly. He had been thinking about Marco's accusation about not voting. "Any way to help earth is something we have to do. It's up to you and Tobias."

"Both of you have to vote one way or someone has to change their minds. Or we end up with a tie," Cassie said softly.

"I'm sorry, Rachel, but... I'm with Cassie. We have to help earth. It's a risk we have to take," Tobias said.

Marco sighed heavily. "I'm with Bird-boy."

"That's that," Jake said.

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Chapter four

Cassie picked up the phone, but before she could think of what to dial, Sheisu appeared. The teenage boy hanging in the air.

"What does everyone want to do?" Sheisu asked in a normal voice this time, running his hand through his hair, almost impatiently. It fell back in his eyes.

Rachel knew that they were committed. "We want to do it."

Sheisu nearly fell out of the air but recovered quickly. "Pardon?" he asked.

"We want to do it. We want to be between worlds."

"You lie," he accused.

"That's what we voted," Jake said.

Sheisu nodded. "Yes, but I don't care. I said, and I quote, 'What do you want to do?' Not 'What did you vote to do?'"

"We accept the risk," Rachel said steadily. "We'll do it."

"Ah, but do you want to?"

"Of course."

Sheisu rolled his eyes. "The day that people stop thinking for themselves is a sad, sad day indeed."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Marco demanded.

"It means that you, Marco, don't want to be in the unknown. And that you, Rachel, don't want to experience anything that you 'remembered' and that Tobias doesn't want to see what's happened to earth by now. And you, Cassie, don't want to risk messing up the true pattern of things, and that you, Aximili, don't want to do something which would involve trusting me. And you, Prince Jake, do not want to put your friends at risk." He smiled smugly and crossed his arms. "I can't make you do something that you don't want to."

Rachel was getting ready to scream in frustration, but she kept her voice even. "We voted and we want to do it."

"Ah, now you want to, Rachel. But does anyone else?"

"Yes," Casie said without hesitating. "I will risk possibly confusing the space-time continuum if it will just mean that I will be able to help with the war."

"But you're doubting! See? You don't know if humans are meant to become pawns of the Yeerks like the Taxxons and Hork-Bajir! Is it

already history? Is it written in a book in the future? Is it written in stone?" Three feet in the air, Sheisu was nowhere near the height of Cassie's eyes, but managed to look straight into them, down to Cassie's soul. Cassie shivered and turned away.

"And now you're doubting!" Sheisu whirled on Rachel and she stood tall.

"I doubt the logic. But I believe that it is the right thing to do."

"Look. I understand that you can read our minds and stuff, but could you please stop terrorizing my friends?" Marco put his arm around Rachel with his usually faintly mocking smile. Tobias, on the other side of her, gave her a half-hug.

"Why? Terrorizing is fun," Sheisu said.

"Oh my god we have a maniac Elimist on our hands," Marco said calmly, looking at Jake.

Jake laughed. Weakly, but he did. "Okay, you understand, Sheisu? We're not going to settle on one answer. We're human. And Andalite. Our minds change. We just pick what action seems best."

Sheisu sighed and sat down. Rather, hovered in sitting position. "Yes. I understand. Well then, how does a temporary solution work? I simply take the ones who want to do this-- and only they-- and give them the powers that I have. For less than a minute."

"Give us some time to talk it over," Jake said.

"No. Give me an answer now."

"I'll do it," Rachel said, stepping forward. Cassie and Tobias trailed behind her. She had a second's feeling of *deja vu* before lightning went off in her face.

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Chapter five

Everything.

Rachel knew everything.

She focused that knowledge on earth. That was why she was like this. She had to look at earth. Earth in what was called the present only seconds ago.

Fayth and her group was surviving. Fayth had no idea what had happened to the girl named Rashel or Rachel or something who had disappeared earlier. She was trying to sleep but Scept kept annoying her. She rolled over and fell totally asleep. Fayth's childishness was a blessing. Her dreams were all happy things.

Jordan screamed in a cage while Telkin 498 fed in the Yeerk pool. She screamed about her mother and her sister, Sara, but it had been so long ago that she no longer remembered the girl named Rachel. Her forgetfulness was a blessing. Because those memories were some of the

best that she had. Nightmares churning in her mind, Jordan hurled insults at the Hork-Bajir guards.

In a stifling corner of her mind, Melissa Chapman whimpered. Her memories were all she had left to call real. When the Yeerk left her mind, all that was left was a cowering, pathetic creature that had to be partially carried back to her cage. From somewhere, Melissa dredged up the memory of two young girls playing in the grass and sunshine with a black and white kitten. Herself and a girl named Rachel.

This girl named Rachel no longer existed in any way that people remembered her or not. But she saw timelines.

How Telkin 298 would go on to be one of the parents of a particularly intelligent Yeerk. How this Yeerk would become a Visser. And how he would find a way to infiltrate the Andalite home world completely...

NO!

One tiny flick at the timelines and Jordan and her Yeerk wouldn't survive a near-fatal battle. One tiny pinch and the plan that hadn't been made yet would fizzle and die.

One small interference, and the Iskoort would be found more than 400 years later than they should, after a dozen more races were invaded, including the Andalites, eventually.

Rachel was about to see what lay after the discovery of the Iskoort when she was suddenly back with the Animorphs, collapsed on the ground.

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Cassie saw timelines.

She smiled as she saw the free Hork-Bajir and Chee-- safe in the mountains. But then the timelines went on. The Hork-Bajir's biological clocks could not be stopped. They killed each other in their wars. And the immortal Chee were left. They decided to leave the planet too late. There were captured and the self-destruct sequence was finally used.

The timeline of the first Yeerks, who found their way into Gedd heads and discovered that they were rich! Far more rich than humans with money, but with sight! Colors! Hearing! Hands!

The timeline of Aftran. From when she was a grub to a whale. Killed by a giant squid when she was old, by whale standards. Cassie found it ironic.

Time was arranged by an ironic being. Yeerks becoming peaceful eventually, and the Andalites, once being set free as hosts, becoming the killers of planets, the unstoppable power.

The Crayak's plan, and how laughable it seemed from Sheisu's point of view. The Elimist's plan, and how pathetic it seemed as well. Irony. Because neither would work. Both would fail. Because--

Back in her body, Cassie felt herself being held up by someone and shaken. "Cassie? Tobias, is Rachel okay? How about Marco? Are they okay?"

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Marco dived into Visser One's timeline.

And he was startled of how easy it would be to kill the Yeerk. Before it ever got to his mother. Before he had to be put through the pain of having her die-- twice. Just like Rachel, all he had to do was gently tap the timelines and... no more Visser One.

No more Animorphs. Because his mother would be taking him and Jake to the movies that night. Rachel and Cassie would stick to the road, alone. And Tobias would be the lone terrorist to stall the Yeerks... The Yeerks wouldn't be stopped. Wouldn't be slowed. Earth would be taken over completely. Marco would be a controller right now. Jake would be a controller. Cassie would be one. Rachel would be one. Tobias... Tobias would be the new Visser Three. With the one Visser Three as Visser One.

No use. It was no use.

No use to mess with time.

Marco ran through the possibilities, checking them. He couldn't make David not turn on them and instead help them. It wasn't possible. But.... no, that wouldn't work either. No, no, no, no! None of them would work. He ran through them frantically. No use waking himself up in the middle of the night the same time "his mother" was about to leave. No use. It wouldn't help them to have more Andalites aboard the dome when it fell into earth's atmosphere. Nothing would help. Elfangor couldn't have lived without the Animorphs dying. No use. No use.

"No use," Marco murmured, before he realized that he was back in his own body.

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Chapter six

"So? What do you think?" Jake asked as everyone walked along. They weren't going anywhere, they were just walking to feel the soft meadow grass under their feet or hooves, to fool themselves that they were still alive instead of a shadow of life. Birds sang above them. It felt like they were alive.

But at least three people in the group had no doubt of it.

"I think that we shouldn't do it," Rachel said.

Marco nodded. "Like I said. No use. There's nothing we can do. Time is steering itself, we can only mess it up."

"Watching it happen won't make us feel better, either," Cassie added. "Especially with the risk involved. I think we should stay dead."

Marco laughed. "Yes. We are taking a vote to stay dead or not."

"Stay dead," Rachel said.

"Stay dead," Marco agreed.

"After hearing your stories, I don't think even my human mind is going to want to change. I'm staying dead," Tobias said.

< I think that would be the wisest course of action as well.>

"That's everyone," Cassie said, squeezing Jake's shoulder.

"Sheisu?" Jake yelled.

The boy materialized. "Don't waste your breath, I already know. But there's a catch."

"Which is?" Jake asked.

"You can't remember any of this. Or your lives. Or anything, for that matter. At all."

There were a few seconds of silence. But Jake still spoke strongly. "We already decided. It's not worth the risk."

"So be it."

A small crack opened up in the ground, and a stream came tumbling out. In a minute, it wound across the meadow out of view. The Animorphs watched silently, debating this fate.

"It's the Lethe. Drink from it," Sheisu said with a backwards glance. And then he was gone.

"What are we waiting for?" Jake asked.

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Cassie was first. She had faith. Jake almost tried to pull her back, but stopped at the last minute.

She dipped her hands into the river, and without hesitating sipped the water.

"It doesn't taste bad...." she started, before trailing off and dropping back into the grass.

"Cassie!" Jake shouted, running forward. Rachel beat him there by a second.

"She's still breathing, Jake. She's fine. She's fine. It just put her to sleep. She's fine," Rachel said, a soothing babble to her cousin.

Jake nodded, trying to put on a brave front. He quickly dipped his hand into the water and drank, accidentally splashing himself with a bit of the water. His eyes met Rachels, and she could see that he wasn't in any pain, nothing bad was happening. Nothing bad would happen. At this point, Jake knew past, present and future, right before it was ripped away from him.

Jake dropped next to Cassie.

With Rachel still kneeling, staring at her best friend and cousin, Ax approached the river. His Prince had done this, he was expected to follow. He knew that the best thing to do was to get it over with, even if he would have to submit, swallow his Andalite pride and forget.

Or maybe he wanted to forget. Forget his old world and his old battles and his old brother, his old enemy, his old war.

Even as he dipped his hoof into the water, Ax didn't know why he was doing it.

As Ax tumbled to the ground, narrowly missing Cassie, Rachel turned and looked at Tobias. She ran back to him and hugged him. "I want to remember you," Rachel whispered, holding back tears. "I don't want to forget you."

"I'll never forget you," Tobias said, hoping he was right.

Marco quietly stayed out of their business. He believed in minding his own business. And for now, he saw nothing better to do than drink the water. Drink from the Lethe. He couldn't get over how much "Lethe" sounded like lethal, at least to him.

He hoped it wouldn't kill him as he took a drink and his mind went hazy. He fought oblivion, managing two staggering steps, but he couldn't concentrate on walking or staying conscious.

Rachel and Tobias heard Marco fall and turned. "It's only us left," Tobias said. He wanted to move to the water, but he didn't want to let go of Rachel. And Rachel didn't want to let go of him.

They silently fought in their minds, wondering who would go next, what they would do. Finally, Rachel pulled Tobias to the river, a bit away from everyone else. "It's smaller than I thought it was," Tobias said. "Clearer. Much nicer in general."

"You thought it would be something?"

Tobias nodded. "The Lethe river. The Sheisu didn't make it up, you know. It's from Greek mythology. It erases souls memories in the underworld."

Rachel held onto Tobias tighter.

"I used to wish I could drink from it, when I lived with my uncle or aunt. I had a few nightmares about it."

Rachel sat down next to the river, Tobias following right behind her.

"I don't want this to end like any of those nightmares..." Tobias murmured, his and Rachel's faces only inches apart.

Rachel reached down quickly and scooped up some of the water of forgetfulness, half-swallowed it, half-splashed it on her mouth, then kissed Tobias.

It took him by surprise. And even as they felt the world fade away, they knew that they would never forget each other.

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Aiiii don't kill me! It was all in fun and games! *looks around pathetically* I didn't mean to make it sappy! Pwease don't expect it from me again!

Aaaanyway, next sequal is called Justice. Not done yet. Barely started yet. Just forget I said anything about it...

End
file.